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Former psychic snoop for Uncle Sam recounts extra-secret program

RICHMOND (AP) — Joseph McMoneagle worked secretly for a decade plying his extra-sensory perception skills for a military intelligence program that used psychics to keep track of friend and foe alike.

McMoneagle, who now lives in rural Nelson County in central Virginia, was part of a 20-year, $20 million program whose missions included telepathic tracking of Lybian leader Moammar Gadhafi and plutonium in North Korea.

After a CIA spokesman confirmed the use of psychics on Tuesday, McMoneagle came forward to champion what he says is a little-understood program that has become the target of ridicule.

On network television last night, in interviews and in a one-hour special scheduled Thursday tomorrow night on ABC, McMoneagle is trying to champion a little-understood, still-secret military intelligence program that he says has wrongly become a target of ridicule.

"People are trashing 20 years of scientific work. It's unconscionable," he said in an interview published Wednesday in the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

McMoneagle said the team of psychics with "remote viewing" abilities fell into disfavor as the military began to recruit psychics from the private sector that he said were overzealous and warped by a blind belief in their abilities.

"Things were getting sort of goofy," he said.

McMoneagle said that for the last 10 years of his Army career, he went to work dressed in civilian clothes most days at a numberless converted mess hall at Fort Meade, Md.

The program so hush-hush that neither his wife nor his closest friends had any idea what he was doing, he said.

"No one knew anything, so nobody really asked questions," he said.

Even after his retirement in 1984, he continued working for on a contract basis for the project codenamed "Stargate."

He did his job in a spartan office decorated with nothing more than a drawing of the Crab nebula that he did himself; he made standard Army wages of $2,500 a month.

"I lived in the barracks; got up and showered and got dressed and went to work," he said.

But his job was hardly the stuff of spy novels or mystery movies.

He refuses to discuss missions in detail, but says even major missions rarely amounted to anything more than being handed an envelope with a photo of someone and trying to sense a related location.

During the Iranian hostage crisis, McMoneagle and other psychics were asked to look at black-and-white pictures of people known to be inside the American Embassy, McMoneagle said. From those, they developed psychic images of the embassy's damaged interior, land mine locations and other data, he said.

"We were quite accurate, it turned out," McMoneagle said, stressing that the psychic intelligence was never relied on exclusively.

The job was a lonely one, and it often wrecked marriages and careers. McMoneagle, who joined the Army after high school and retired as a chief warrant officer, lasted longer than most.

"I really have the feeling that I was doing something to help our country; I had a real sense that what I was doing was important."

But he conceded that the isolation of his job and the disrespect it was accorded by traditional intelligence operatives took its toll.

"I wouldn't do it again for $10 million, but you couldn't pay me $30 million for the experience," McMoneagle said.

This article was also published with differing headlines in the following newspapers:

1995-11-30 Danville Register and Bee (p.3) Former psychic snoop for Uncle Sam recounts extra-secret program
1995-11-30 Potomac News (p.2) Army psychic defends responsibilities
1995-11-30 The News Virginian (p.1-2) Nelson man a former psychic spy for the government